

Johnson and the Bundy Dilemma

By Drew Pearson

The most urgent personnel problem facing LBJ is right inside the White House—namely, what to do about McGeorge Bundy, who has been offered a big job but actually doesn't want to leave; and what to do about Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, who has been participating more and more in problems outside the Pentagon.



Pearson

The President is reported inclined to replace Bundy with McNamara, making him "Assistant President" and the second most powerful man in the USA. This raises two significant questions:

1. Will McNamara, as Coordinator of Foreign Affairs inside the White House, supersede Dean Rusk, Secretary of State?

2. Will military thinking dominate our foreign affairs, supposedly directed by civilians?

The answer to the first is that Rusk doesn't seem to mind having McNamara barge into foreign policy. They get

along well together; even cooperate in making mistakes together.

Military Dominance

The answer to problem No. 2 is that military thinking has already dominated our supposedly civilian foreign policy for some time.

Specifically, and quite recently, we have had the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Maxwell Taylor, serving as Ambassador in South Vietnam, and it was the Joint Chiefs of Staff who really sold Mr. Johnson on the policy of bombing North Vietnam—a policy which Secretary McNamara now tacitly admits has been a failure.

It will be recalled that on the night of Feb. 6 and the early morning of Feb. 7, when a hastily called White House conference decided to bomb North Vietnam, Secretary of State Rusk was in Florida, ill, and George Ball, the Acting Secretary of State, argued against the bombing. He knew that Soviet Premier Kosygin had just arrived in Hanoi, capital of North Vietnam, and while he did not know specifically that Kosygin was in our corner, the State Department suspected it.

Later developments have

shown that one day before we started bombing North Vietnam, Kosygin had actually urged the Chinese to help end the war in Vietnam, or as the Chinese put it, "serve as a pawn for U.S. imperialism."

However, on that fateful night, acting Secretary of State Ball was overwhelmed by the arguments of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Their advice prevailed.

Therefore McNamara's transfer to the White House would really make no change in the fact that the military dominate U.S. foreign policy today.

Bundy's Role

The one man who has spoken out against military domination in closed door conferences is the White House adviser who now may be leaving, McGeorge Bundy. In the last few months he has been joined by Arthur Goldberg, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and by Vice President Humphrey.

Bundy cannot speak out publicly as can McNamara. He fights his battles in the privacy of the White House. In various high level conferences however, Bundy has differed with military advisers, sometimes also with the President.

Despite this, Bundy has

been close to the President. Mr. Johnson likes him and has leaned on him.

Whereas some of the old Kennedy staff in the White House were aloof from LBJ, Bundy has been loyal and devoted. It is not true that he has remained only because he cherished an ambition to be Secretary of State, nor that he wants to leave the White House now. He doesn't.

The President has been a bit ticked, first because he thinks Bundy wants to leave, second because the Ford Foundation leaked word that it had offered Bundy \$75,000.

There is nothing in the world that the President likes less than news leaks. And he may well think that Bundy has leaked this column to me. I hasten to point out that, having been out of the United States and in the hospital myself for some time, I have not seen McGeorge Bundy for four months.

Originally I thought Bundy was not the best influence on Lyndon Johnson. It was Lyndon Johnson who convinced me otherwise. It would be too bad to have Bundy depart. However, it would not materially change American policy. That policy has long been dominated by the military and will so continue.

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